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October 7, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.  
Director and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE**

This is to provide you with an update on avian influenza and Public Health's efforts to prepare for and respond to this threat. On October 5, 2005 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) held a press conference that included a discussion of avian influenza. This issue has received substantial media attention including coverage on television and radio and articles this week in the *New York* and *Los Angeles Times*.

The World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that since December 2003 there have been 116 human cases of H5N1 avian influenza resulting in 60 deaths in 4 countries (Indonesia, Thailand, Viet Nam and Cambodia). To date most cases have been linked to close contact with infected birds. The rare cases of human-to-human transmission have been limited to family members who had close contact with and cared for sick relatives.

CDC has issued an embargo against the import of birds and hatchling eggs from the following areas in Southeast Asia: Cambodia; Indonesia; Japan; Laos; People's Republic of China, including Hong Kong, SAR; South Korea; Thailand; Vietnam; Hong Kong; and Malaysia. CDC took this step because birds from these affected regions potentially can infect humans with Influenza A (H5N1). This order complements a similar action taken by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The CDC also has issued an outbreak notification to inform travelers to the region to take precautions including avoiding contact with live, well-appearing, sick, or dead poultry and surfaces that may have been contaminated by poultry secretions and to avoid consumption of uncooked poultry or poultry products.

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Public Health has included the possibility of a flu pandemic in its planning for some time. Recently Public Health has undertaken several activities to enhance preparedness for and response to the introduction of H5N1 infection in Los Angeles County. These include:

- Increasing surveillance for influenza-like illness including: (1) Adding several new participants in state's sentinel physician program; (2) Publishing an article in *The Public's Health* (monthly newsletters to all physicians in Los Angeles County) regarding ongoing avian flu problem in South East Asia; (3) Emphasizing that staff remain on alert for incoming cases of flu-like illness from that region; and (4) Expanding to eight sites the Student Health Center Project which conducts surveillance for specific symptoms among college students.
- Final arrangements are in progress to increase the Public Health Lab's capacity to test specimens to identify the H5N1 virus. Currently samples must be sent to the State laboratory.
- A comprehensive pandemic response component has been prepared for the All-Hazards Plan with input from multiple sectors including healthcare, mental health, law enforcement and the Coroner. This component includes the role of the Strategic National Stockpile in antiviral supplies and exercises to practice provision of potential vaccines.
- Review of the Hospital Association of Southern California's Recommended Management Actions to Prepare Hospitals For Overflow Situations in conjunction with Acute Communicable Disease Control, Emergency Medical Services, and Health Facilities. This White Paper provides guidance on hospital and emergency department response to large-scale infectious disease problems.
- The Los Angeles County Pandemic Influenza Plan is being enhanced to strengthen sections on surveillance, laboratory, vaccine, antiviral medications, risk communications, limiting transmission, and emergency response and will be used in a tabletop exercise in April 2006.
- Other materials that have been developed to assist in preparation and response include the Pandemic Influenza Plan for Acute Care Hospital Settings and Dispensing/Vaccination Centers for Hospital Employees Guidelines. These materials were sent to all hospitals in Los Angeles County.
- Los Angeles County continues to disseminate information to health care providers and hospital regarding enhanced surveillance for avian influenza via the HASEN system and the REDDINET systems.

We will update you as more information becomes available. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please let either of us know.

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c: Chief Administrative Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors